



Town Council Meeting

April 14, 2025 at 6:00 PM

Howey-in the-Hills Town Hall

101 N. Palm Ave.,

Howey-in-the-Hills, FL 34737

MINUTES

Mayor Wells called the Town Council Special Meeting to order at 6:02 p.m.
Mayor Wells led the attendees in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.
Councilor Reneé Lannamañ delivered an invocation.

ROLL CALL

Acknowledgement of Quorum Present and Proper Notice Given

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Mayor Pro Tem Tim Everline (via Zoom) | Councilor Jon Arnold | Councilor Reneé Lannamañ | Councilor David Miles | Mayor Graham Wells

STAFF PRESENT:

Sean O'Keefe, Town Manager | Tom Wilkes, Town Attorney | April Fisher, Town Planner | Public Works Director, Morgan Cates | Victoria Roszkiewicz, Executive Assistant to the Town Manager

Motion made by Councilor Lannamañ to allow Mayor Pro Tem Everline to participate and vote remotely via Zoom; seconded by Councilor Miles. Motion approved unanimously by voice vote.

Voting

Yea: Councilor Arnold, Councilor Lannamañ, Councilor Miles, Mayor Wells

Nay: None

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

1. Introduction and Presentation: **Lake County Fire Rescue, Chief Michael Vitta - Monthly Fire Rescue Report**

Lake County Public Safety Director, David Kilbury and Division Chief Fire Marshal, Michael Vitta were introduced to the Town Council during the meeting. Director Kilbury shared that, although he has served in his role for nearly two years, this was his first formal introduction to the Council. He explained that Lake County Fire Rescue now provides monthly analytics on calls for service in and around Howey-in-the-Hills, ranging from minor service calls to full structure fires. The data includes GPS mapping of incidents, and the department serves six municipalities in total, with Howey-in-the-Hills being a vital customer.

Director Kilbury emphasized the department's commitment to strong partnerships, noting that each municipality has a designated senior staff member serving as a quasi-fire chief for strategic planning and liaison purposes. For Howey-in-the-Hills, that person is Division Chief Mike Vitta. Chief Vitta expressed appreciation for the collaborative relationship with the Town and reiterated his availability to assist with community events and emergency preparedness.

During the presentation, Councilor David Miles asked about the breakdown of medical versus fire calls. Director Kilbury noted that 80–90% of calls are medical in nature, which is typical for modern fire departments. He further explained that all personnel are required to be certified at the Basic Life Support (EMT) level and must become Advanced Life Support (paramedic) certified within three years of hire. Director Kilbury described Lake County's innovative efforts to address staffing and training shortages, including launching the first county-run paramedic academy in Florida.

Director Kilbury also provided a personal biography detailing his 41-year career in fire service, including roles in Cape Coral, Clermont, Kissimmee, and Orange County before assuming his current role. Chief Vitta followed with his own background, sharing his early career in Parkland and Greenacres, his time as a state fire marshal arson investigator, and his current role as Lake County's Fire Marshal, a position he has held since 2014.

The presentation concluded with expressions of gratitude from both Town officials and the visiting fire officials, with mutual appreciation for ongoing collaboration, particularly in supporting community events like Founder's Day.

AGENDA APPROVAL/REVIEW

Motion made by Councilor Lannamañ to approve the meeting's agenda; seconded by Councilor Miles. Motion approved unanimously by voice vote.

Voting

Yea: Mayor Pro Tem Everline, Councilor Arnold, Councilor Lannamañ, Councilor Miles, Mayor Wells

Nay: None

PUBLIC QUESTION & COMMENT

Any person wishing to address the Mayor and Town Council and who is not on the agenda is asked to speak their name and address. Three (3) minutes is allocated per speaker. The general Public Question & Comment period will be limited to a maximum of thirty (30) minutes unless extended by the Presiding Officer.

Banks Helfrich, 9100 Sam's Lake Rd., Clermont FL – Mr. Helfrich spoke on the theme of taxes.

CONSENT AGENDA

Routine items are placed on the Consent Agenda to expedite the meeting. If Town Council/Staff wish to discuss any item, the procedure is as follows: (1) Pull the item(s) from the Consent Agenda; (2) Vote on the remaining item(s); and (3) Discuss each pulled item and vote.

Councilor Miles asked to pull agenda items #4 and #5.

2. The approval of the minutes and ratification and confirmation of all Town Council actions at the April 1, 2025, Town Council Special Meeting.
3. The approval of the minutes and ratification and confirmation of all Town Council actions at the April 3, 2025, Town Council Workshop.
4. Consideration and Approval: **Selection of Library Board Members**

Councilor Miles pulled the item to address potential conflicts created when relatives of Town employees or elected officials serve on advisory boards. With three vacancies and only three applicants—incumbents Jim Steele, Tahsia O’Keefe (spouse of the Town Manager), and Beth Flack—Councilor Miles moved to re-appoint all three but to limit Mrs. O’Keefe’s term to a temporary appointment ending September 30, 2025, while the Town solicits an unrelated replacement. Staff reiterated its longstanding preference to avoid appointing relatives yet acknowledged the chronic shortage of volunteers. Mayor Wells noted that no ordinance currently bars such appointments, and he highlighted Mrs. O’Keefe’s positive service record. Mayor Pro Tem Everline and Councilor Lannamañ echoed the concern about appearances of conflict.

Mayor Wells opened Public Comment for this item only.

Marie Gallelli, 1104 N. Tangerine Ave. – Resident Marie Gallelli agreed with Councilor Miles that the Council should separate staff from families serving on boards and urged proactive recruitment to eliminate family ties on boards.

Mayor Wells closed Public Comment for this item only.

Councilor Lannamañ stated that she would second Councilor Miles’ motion if he changed the end date of Mrs. O’Keefe’s term to October 31, 2025.

Motion made by Councilor Miles to re-appoint Jim Steele, Tahsia O’Keefe, and Beth Flack to the Library Board and re-appoint Tina St. Clair to the Planning and Zoning Board, while reducing Tahsia O’Keefe’s term on the Library Board to end on October 31, 2025; seconded by Councilor Lannamañ. Motion failed by a 2-3 roll call vote.

Voting

Yea: Councilor Lannamañ, Councilor Miles

Nay: Mayor Pro Tem Everline, Councilor Arnold, Mayor Wells

Motion made by Councilor Lannamañ to reappoint Jim Steele, Tahsia O’Keefe, and Beth Flack to standard 2-year terms on the Library Board; seconded by Mayor Pro Tem Everline. Motion approved 3-2 on a roll call vote.

Voting

Yea: Councilor Arnold, Councilor Lannamañ, Mayor Wells

Nay: Mayor Pro Tem Everline, Councilor Miles

5. Consideration and Approval: **Selection of Planning and Zoning Board Member**

Motion made by Councilor Miles to re-appoint Tina St. Clair to the Planning and Zoning Board; seconded by Councilor Lannamañ. Motion approved unanimously by voice vote.

Voting

Yea: Mayor Pro Tem Everline, Councilor Arnold, Councilor Lannamañ, Councilor Miles, Mayor Wells

Nay: None

6. Consideration and Approval: **Planning and Zoning Chair & Vice-Chair Approval**

Motion made by Councilor Lannamañ ratify the Planning and Zoning Board’s selection of Tina St. Clair as Chair and Frances Wagler as Vice Chair of the Planning and Zoning Board; seconded by Mayor Pro Tem Everline. Motion approved unanimously by voice vote.

Voting

Yea: Mayor Pro Tem Everline, Councilor Arnold, Councilor Lannamañ, Councilor Miles, Mayor Wells

Nay: None

7. Consideration and Approval: **Whispering Heights Utility Agreement**

After asking to pull Agenda Items #4 and #5 from the Consent Agenda for discussion, Councilor Miles made a motion to approve all other items on the Consent Agenda; seconded by Councilor Lannamañ. Motion approved by voice vote.

Voting

Yea: Councilor Arnold, Councilor Lannamañ, Councilor Miles, Mayor Wells

Nay: Mayor Pro Tem Everline

After discussion was had on Agenda Items #4 and #5, and a vote had also been taken to approve Agenda Item #6 separately, the Town Council was confused and another motion to approve the Consent Agenda was asked for and given.

Motion made by Councilor Miles to approve Consent Agenda items #2, #3, & #7; seconded by Councilor Lannamañ. Motion approved unanimously by voice vote.

Voting

Yea: Mayor Pro Tem Everline, Councilor Arnold, Councilor Lannamañ, Councilor Miles, Mayor Wells

Nay: None

PUBLIC HEARING

Mayor Wells suspended the Town Council meeting at 6:42 pm.

Mayor Wells convened the Board of Adjustment at 6:42 pm. to hear two variance public hearings.

8. Consideration and Approval: **1009 N Hamlin Ave Variance Application**

Town Planner, April Fisher, presented two related variance requests for the property at 1009 North Hamlin Avenue, which consists of two platted lots: Lot 1 (containing an existing home) and Lot 2 (previously used as the backyard). The current property owner seeks to separate the lots for independent use and sale. However, the home on Lot 1 encroaches into the required rear setback, and future right-of-way dedication needed by the Town from Lot 2 reduces its size below the minimum 15,000 square feet required by zoning.

Town Planner Fisher explained that, due to these unique conditions—not caused by the owner—staff initiated the variance applications to bring both lots into legal compliance. One variance (Item 8) requested relief from the minimum lot size and rear setback requirements for Lot 1. The other (Item 9) requested relief from the minimum lot size requirement for Lot 2. Mrs. Fisher confirmed the Planning & Zoning Board recommended approval of both variances, noting that its Chair recused herself due to involvement in the property's prior sale.

Councilor Miles moved approval of both items, citing the Town's role in creating the issue due to planned infrastructure improvements along North Citrus Avenue. Clarifying a point of confusion, the Town Manager stated that, while the variances relate to the upcoming right-of-way project, no land purchase is involved in these agenda items—property acquisition is addressed separately under Agenda Item #11. Mayor Pro Tem Everline expressed concern about the broader context of property purchases, in that there was monetary involvement, and voted against both variances on those grounds.

Motion made by Councilor Miles to approve the 1009 N Hamlin Ave. Variance; seconded by Councilor Lannamañ. Motion approved by roll call vote.

Voting

Yea: Councilor Arnold, Councilor Lannamañ, Councilor Miles, Mayor Wells

Nay: Mayor Pro Tem Everline

9. Consideration and Approval: **Parcel Identified by Alt Key #1256348 Variance Application**

Motion made by Councilor Miles to approve the Variance Application for the Parcel Identified by Alt Key #1256348; seconded by Councilor Lannamañ. Motion approved by roll call vote.

Voting

Yea: Councilor Arnold, Councilor Lannamañ, Councilor Miles, Mayor Wells

Nay: Mayor Pro Tem Everline

Motion made by Councilor Lannamañ to adjourn the Board of Adjustment Meeting; Seconded by Councilor Miles. Motion approved unanimously by voice vote.

Voting

Yea: Mayor Pro Tem Everline , Councilor Arnold, Councilor Lannamañ, Councilor Miles, Mayor Wells

Nay: None

Mayor Wells reconvened the Town Council Meeting at 6:54 pm.

OLD BUSINESS

None

NEW BUSINESS

10. Consideration and Approval: **Law Enforcement Month Proclamation - May 2025**

Mayor Wells asked the Town Manager to read out loud Proclamation 2025-001 – Law Enforcement Month (May 2025).

Motion made by Councilor Lannamañ to approve the Proclamation; seconded by Councilor Arnold. Motion approved unanimously by voice vote.

Voting

Yea: Mayor Pro Tem Everline, Councilor Arnold, Councilor Lannamañ, Councilor Miles, Mayor Wells

Nay: None

Mayor Wells thank the Police Chief and all of his Officers for their service to the Town.

11. Consideration and Approval: **Citrus Avenue Right-of-Way Agreements**

Town Manager, Sean O’Keefe, introduced and explained this agenda item, seeking Council’s approval of three negotiated right-of-way agreements related to the planned realignment and safety improvements for North Citrus Avenue. The agreements, reached with property owners Edward Lynch & Elizabeth Antonio, Robert Walenga, and George Lehning, allow the Town to acquire approximately 2,700 square feet of land to bring the road fully within the public right-of-way and to allow space for future infrastructure such as water lines and sidewalks. In return, the Town will compensate the property

owners a total of \$9,747, based on a calculated rate of \$3.63 per square foot using local undeveloped land sale values.

Mayor Pro Tem Everline raised questions about the terms, clarifying that one property owner—the Lynches—would also receive compensation in addition to benefiting from a variance approved earlier in the meeting. Town Manager O’Keefe confirmed that the variance and payment served distinct purposes and that securing a full 60-foot right-of-way is essential for infrastructure and safety improvements.

Mayor Wells opened Public Comment for this item only.

George Lehning, 1004 Citrus Ave. – Resident George Lehning, one of the affected property owners, shared a detailed account of longstanding concerns regarding the misalignment of the roadway. Mr. Lehning explained that, after purchasing his property in 2008, he discovered that a portion of Citrus Avenue pavement extended into his deeded property—something confirmed through Lake County plat and tax records. He recalled previously raising this issue with the Town Council years ago, with no corrective action taken at the time. While expressing appreciation that the Town was finally addressing the issue, he voiced frustration at the small compensation being offered for land the Town had long used, stating that it felt unfair to characterize the transaction as a mere right-of-way dedication. Nevertheless, Mr. Lehning affirmed his support for the Town and agreed to the terms in the interest of moving forward.

Mr. O’Keefe clarified that, in Mr. Lehning’s specific case, the property line extended across the existing pavement to the opposite side of the road, reinforcing the need for a realignment. Councilor Miles emphasized the safety concerns at the intersection, recalling a near-miss experience shortly after moving to the neighborhood. He noted that the project would not only resolve legal property conflicts but also improve visibility and public safety in an area with a history of poor sightlines and high speeds.

Edward Lynch 1009 Hamlin Ave. – Resident Edward Lynch, of the property owners affected by the right-of-way agreements, spoke in support of the proposed road improvements. He described the existing conditions along Citrus Avenue as hazardous, noting that, in the year he has lived there, he has been forced off the road multiple times, nearly hitting his own fence. Mr. Lynch expressed strong appreciation for the Town’s efforts to address the issue and conveyed his eagerness to see the project completed to improve safety for all residents.

Mayor Wells closed Public Comment for this item.

Following public comment, there were additional comments by Councilor Lannamañ and Councilor Miles acknowledging the long effort to address this infrastructure need.

Motion made by Councilor Lannamañ to approve Citrus Avenue Right-of-Way Agreements; seconded by Councilor Miles. Motion approved unanimously by roll call vote.

Voting

Yea: Mayor Pro Tem Everline, Councilor Arnold, Councilor Lannamañ, Councilor Miles, Mayor Wells
Nay: None

12. Consideration and Approval: Drake Point Utility Agreement

Town Manager, Sean O’Keefe, introduced an agreement with the developers of Drake Point, a proposed residential development outside the Town’s boundaries near the curve on SR 48 toward Yalaha. Although Drake Point previously planned to build its own utility systems, the developers now wish to connect to the Town’s water and wastewater services, recognizing the benefits of working within the

Town's existing and soon-to-expand infrastructure. The agreement is modeled on the earlier Cedar Creek agreement and includes an annexation clause for future incorporation into the Town.

Drake Point seeks to reserve 525 Equivalent Residential Units (ERUs) of wastewater capacity. Town wastewater capacity stands at 1,600 units, with approximately 1,000 already reserved by Lake Hills, Whispering Heights, and Watermark. Mission Rise has not yet secured its needed 415 ERUs, and Town staff emphasized that connections are available on a first-come, first-served basis per the agreement with the CDD.

Councilor Miles, having reviewed Florida Statute 171.044 on voluntary annexation, asserted that Drake Point already meets the state's contiguity requirement via state-owned water bodies and expressed support for annexation. Town Attorney, Tom Wilkes, explained that, if Council approves the agreement, it serves as the developer's perpetual petition and consent to annex, binding all future owners. The agreement provides for annexation within six months of eligibility. Developers have requested a delay in annexation until they record their plat with Lake County, after which the Town would formally initiate annexation.

Mayor Wells inquired whether the recorded plat could be rejected by the Town if it conflicts with local land development regulations. Mr. Wilkes clarified that, under the agreement, the Town must accept the development's county-approved entitlements as-is. Councilor Miles and Mr. Wilkes also confirmed that, once annexed, inspections for new homes would be administered by the Town, which has a strong reputation for effective construction oversight.

Mayor Pro Tem Everline raised concerns about capacity implications, especially if Mission Rise seeks service after Drake Point. Town staff and legal counsel clarified that the agreement includes safeguards:

- A three-year window for initial connection, after which the CDD can revoke unutilized capacity, and
- A ten-year cap after which unconnected property could lose access unless renegotiated.

Councilor Miles praised the agreement's structure and protections, reiterated the importance of annexation within six months, and expressed confidence in the Town's readiness to handle long-term utility demands.

Mayor Wells opened Public Comment for this item only.

Marie Gallelli, 1104 N Tangerine Ave. - Resident Marie Gallelli raised concerns about the sequencing of the annexation and platting process for the Drake Point development. Referring to past issues with the Talichet development project, she questioned whether allowing the developers to plat their property through Lake County before annexing into the Town might result in infrastructure that does not meet Town standards, particularly regarding pipe sizes and utility layout. She asked whether the Town, as the utility provider, retains review authority over infrastructure design even while the development remains under County jurisdiction.

Mr. Wilkes confirmed that all utility infrastructure—water and wastewater systems—must be reviewed and approved by the Town, regardless of the development's land use approvals from Lake County. Because the Town is the designated utility provider, its standards and oversight apply to all aspects of system construction and installation.

Mrs. Gallelli further inquired about the developer's motivation for delaying annexation. Mr. Wilkes explained that the developer seeks to complete all land use and platting approvals through Lake County before annexing to avoid having to restart the process under Town regulations. The developer has already spent significant time and effort securing County approvals and they wish to avoid any uncertainty or duplication.

Mayor Pro Tem Everline and Mayor Wells agreed with that interpretation, noting that the developer's lots likely do not conform with the Town's updated comprehensive plan or lot size standards, which would have posed a challenge had the project started under Town jurisdiction. Councilor Miles acknowledged this point, reiterating his support for the annexation timeline while emphasizing the Town's continued role in utility oversight.

Mayor Wells closed Public Comment for this item.

Councilor Jon Arnold inquired whether Drake Point's wastewater connection to the Town's system would affect other developments, particularly Lake Hills. Dean Barberree of Reader Communities, representing Lake Hills, confirmed that coordination with Drake Point was ongoing. A cost-sharing agreement was being worked out to ensure the shared force main line at the County Road 48 connection point would accommodate flow from Drake Point, Bishop's Gate, Westminster, Thompson Grove, and other surrounding properties.

Further discussion clarified that each development would construct its own lift stations to deliver wastewater to the shared connection point. Councilor Miles voiced concern about whether a re-pumping station would be needed at the confluence of these flows. David Stokes, engineer for the Lake Hills project, stated it was unlikely, given the design configurations, and affirmed that each developer is responsible for system design to meet required pressure and flow rates. The Town would not need to upsize any pipes or provide additional pumping infrastructure.

Following this technical discussion, Councilor Lannamañ made a motion to approve the agreement, citing her understanding that annexation would follow shortly after platting. Councilor Miles seconded and reaffirmed his expectation that the development would be annexed and that inspections would be handled by the Town.

Motion made by Councilor Lannamañ to approve the Drake Point Utility Agreement; seconded by Councilor Miles. Motion approved unanimously by roll call vote.

Voting

Yea: Mayor Pro Tem Everline, Councilor Arnold, Councilor Lannamañ, Councilor Miles, Mayor Wells

Nay: None

13. Consideration and Approval: Lake Hills - Main Blvd. and Mass Grading

During discussion of the Lake Hills Main Boulevard and mass grading plan, the Town Council revisited long-standing concerns regarding the absence of traffic circles at both ends of the proposed spine road, as previously directed in the April 2024 development approval. Town Planner, April Fisher, noted that planning staff recommended approval of the application contingent upon identification of replacement tree locations in the separate residential plan. However, Councilor Miles expressed strong dissatisfaction that the submitted plans omitted traffic circles at the intersections with State Road 19 and County Road 48, which he stated were clearly intended by the Council as essential traffic calming and safety features.

Councilors Miles and Mayor Pro Tem Everline both criticized the perceived deviation from Council direction, highlighting that the traffic impacts of the 571-unit development justified the roundabouts. Developer, Dean Barberree, of Reader Communities responded that the construction of the roundabouts was conditioned on traffic warrants and subject to the approval of Lake County and FDOT. He explained that Lake County had recommended a turn lane solution on CR 48, and FDOT was currently working with Publix on a traffic signal study for SR 19. He acknowledged that the developer had agreed to pay a proportionate share toward a future roundabout at SR 19 and CR 48, which is being preliminarily designed by FDOT.

Town Attorney, Tom Wilkes, affirmed that the developer was obligated under the previously approved development conditions to either construct or fund the construction of traffic circles at both intersections once warranted. He emphasized that this requirement was not ambiguous, and that the developer could not rely solely on agency staff recommendations to bypass Council directives. A robust exchange followed about coordinating with affected parties, including Mission Inn, Publix, and potential Thompson Grove developers, and ensuring future infrastructure costs were equitably shared.

Following extended deliberation, Councilor Miles moved to approve the mass grading and main boulevard plans subject to the applicant revising the plans to show traffic circles at both ends of the spine road and coordinating with adjacent property owners and staff. Mayor Pro Tem Everline voted against the motion, stating that approval should wait until updated drawings and financial commitments were finalized. The motion passed by a 4-1 vote. The developer agreed to limit construction within a buffer near the intersections until resolution and to work with staff on revised intersection designs.

Motion made by Councilor Miles to approve the Lake Hills Main Boulevard and mass grading plans, subject to a requirement for the applicant to redesign the intersections of the Main Boulevard at both SR 19 and CR 48 to reflect the construction of traffic circles and coordinate with the other property owners in the Lake Hills project (i.e. Publix, Mission Inn, FDOT and other applicants) to effectuate the traffic circle design on all parties' plans; seconded by Councilor Lannamañ. Motion approved by roll call vote.

Voting

Yea: Councilor Arnold, Councilor Lannamañ, Councilor Miles, Mayor Wells

Nay: Mayor Pro Tem Everline

Mayor Pro Tem Everline voted no, explaining that Council should receive the fully revised drawings before any approval and that a clear cost-sharing agreement must be finalized. He emphasized that, for FDOT to sign off on the intersection work, the Town must first specify exactly who will fund each element; approving the plans without that certainty, he said, would be “putting the cart before the horse.”

14. Consideration and Approval: (First Reading) Ordinance 2025-001 - CIP Amendment

Councilors coordinated schedules and agreed to hold a special session on Wednesday, May 1 at 1:00 p.m., which will function as a working lunch. During this session, the Council will conduct the first reading and in-depth discussion of the Capital Improvement Plan amendment, with the second reading scheduled for Tuesday, May 27 (adjusted due to Memorial Day). The Purchasing Policy update will first be discussed at the April 28 regular Council meeting, and, if consensus is reached, a revised resolution will be brought forward for potential approval at the May 1 special session.

Motion made by Councilor Lannamañ to schedule a Special Town Council Meeting on May 1, 2025, at 1:00 pm and to table the first reading of Ordinance 2025-001 to that Special Town Council Meeting; also the discussion on Amending the Purchasing Policy will be tabled to the April 28, 2025, Town Council Meeting; seconded by Councilor Miles. Motion approved unanimously by voice vote.

Voting

Yea: Mayor Pro Tem Everline, Councilor Arnold, Councilor Lannamañ, Councilor Miles, Mayor Wells

Nay: None

15. Discussion: Amending the Purchasing Policy

This agenda item was tabled to the April 28, 2025, Town Council Meeting during the motion for Agenda Item #14.

DEPARTMENT REPORTS

16. Town Hall

This report was included in the meeting's packet.

17. Police Department

This report was included in the meeting's packet.

18. Code Enforcement

This report was included in the meeting's packet.

19. Public Services Department

This report was included in the meeting's packet.

20. Parks & Recreation Board

This report was included in the meeting's packet.

21. Library / Community Events

This report was included in the meeting's packet.

22. Town Attorney

None

23. Finance Supervisor

Mayor Wells encouraged Council members to review the staff reports included in their packets, particularly the financial report prepared by Finance Supervisor, Oscar Ojeda, which he noted is likely to serve as the format for the upcoming budget. He highlighted the usefulness of the February report, especially the general fund summary on pages one and two, which outlines revenue, expenditures, and current bank balances. While Mr. Ojeda was noted to be on vacation, councilors were advised to direct any questions to the Town Manager rather than the Mayor.

Councilor Miles offered a recommendation for future budgeting practices. He suggested that each employee's total compensation be fully reflected within the primary cost center to which they are assigned, with interfund allocations handled through transfer in/transfer out entries. This would allow for a more transparent view of total personnel costs per department or function. He noted the current format made it difficult to assess full costs—for example, seeing only the general fund portion of the Town Manager's salary led to confusion. The Town Manager confirmed that this approach has already been discussed with Mr. Ojeda and will be implemented for the next fiscal year, with the exception of staff fully funded by enterprise funds like the water utility fund.

Additional budgetary considerations were discussed regarding the 10% utility tax currently collected through water bills. Mayor Wells reminded the Council that this tax is already being transferred into the general fund, a process that was implemented the previous year. Councilor Miles affirmed that this tax is unrestricted in use and should not be shown as supporting water-related expenditures, as doing so previously created the false impression that the utility fund was financially solvent when it was, in fact,

operating at a loss. Council members agreed on the need to continue streamlining the budget to accurately reflect revenues and expenditures.

24. Town Manager

Town Manager, Sean O’Keefe, provided a brief community update, highlighting upcoming events. He wished everyone a happy Holy Week and reminded the Council and public of the Easter Egg Dash scheduled for Saturday, April 19th, at Central Park behind the library and Town Hall. The event begins at 10:00 a.m. and runs until noon, featuring activities such as an Easter Egg Dash, photos with the Easter Bunny, and arts and crafts.

Mr. O’Keefe also previewed the upcoming Founders Day celebration on Saturday, May 10th, at Griffin Park. The festivities will include a 1920s-style jazz band, a car show, bounce houses, a rock wall, a vendor market, and a parade at 2:00 p.m. led by Mr. Howey’s grandchildren as grand marshals.

Mayor Wells added further details, noting attractions such as a children’s video game trailer, a kiddie train ride along Lakeshore, a trolley bus, and public safety vehicle displays including a fire truck and ambulance provided by Lake County Fire Rescue, as well as a garbage truck (with no risk of hydraulic leaks). He acknowledged the significant costs associated with the event but reported that nearly \$28,000 had been raised through sponsorships, which is expected to cover the entire event. Any remaining funds may be carried forward to support the Town’s Christmas festivities.

Mayor Wells praised the staff committee that has been meeting weekly to organize the event and encouraged Council members to help promote it on social media. He also mentioned the outreach plan, which includes printed flyers in the water bills mailed to 673 households, digital PDFs for e-bill recipients, and a final distribution via the Post Office’s Every Door Direct Mail (EDDM) service to residents in Howey and Yalaha. He expressed confidence that the event would be a great success and emphasized the importance of community participation.

COUNCIL MEMBER COMMENT

25. Mayor Pro Tem Everline

During Mayor Pro Tem Everline’s comments, he inquired about the status of the lift station at Talichet, specifically expressing concern about ensuring emergency pump connectivity if the station is not operational by hurricane season. Resident Joshua Husemann responded in detail, summarizing the current status of the lift station turnover process. He noted that, following a February 24 meeting and a March 5 HOA meeting attended by the Town Manager and approximately 30 residents, there was agreement among attendees to move forward. The matter is now in the hands of the HOA’s legal counsel who is preparing the necessary documentation and ballots for formal member approval.

Mr. Husemann explained that legal counsel has been in contact with GrayRobinson and Town staff to clarify expectations. The plan includes a one-time assessment of approximately \$758–\$780 per homeowner to cover the costs of improvements. Once the legal documents are finalized, the HOA board will meet, notice will be sent with the required 14-day notice period, and then the member vote can proceed. If all goes smoothly, Mr. Husemann hopes to bring the item before Council for approval at the first meeting in May.

Mr. Husemann also clarified that the lift station is not part of surface water management, eliminating concerns about needing approval from the St. Johns River Water Management District. Furthermore, the HOA is proposing an agreement to continue mowing any remaining portion of the tract outside the fenced lift station area to reduce Town maintenance obligations.

26. Councilor Arnold

Councilor Arnold shared that the Howey Mansion will host a special Founder's Day event on May 3rd, organized in coordination with the University of Central Florida Alumni Association. The event will include a unique guided tour of the mansion, featuring complimentary snacks and a cash bar—amenities not typically included in standard mansion tours. Additionally, the cost of attendance is reduced to \$20, which is lower than the usual tour price. Councilor Arnold emphasized that the event is open to the general public, not just UCF alumni or those typically affiliated with university events.

27. Councilor Miles

Councilor Miles requested that the financial reports prepared by the Town's Finance Supervisor, Oscar Ojeda, also be provided in Excel format for easier review and manipulation. The Town Manager and staff affirmed that this would be possible, clarifying that the reports are already built using Excel within the accounting software (Black Mountain Software). Councilor Miles emphasized the importance of being able to work with the data independently, particularly to better understand monthly revenues and expenditures, even if some revenue sources lag due to state and utility distribution schedules. He also suggested that, going forward, the Town aim to review the prior month's financials by the second council meeting each month.

Mayor Wells responded that, while this is theoretically possible, there are structural delays in revenue reporting, particularly franchise fees, communication service tax, and sales taxes, that are always reported one to two months in arrears. These delays make it challenging to provide a full, accurate picture on a month-by-month basis without relying on accrual methods, which the Town has moved toward for better long-term accuracy.

In addition, Councilor Miles urged the Council to begin planning for a long-term borrowing strategy to finance significant upcoming water and wastewater infrastructure needs. He identified at least five major projects with estimated costs exceeding several million dollars each, including the expansion of water treatment facilities, interconnectivity pipelines, pump upgrades, and system-wide pipe replacements. He proposed considering utility revenue bonds, SRF loans, or other long-term financing mechanisms, warning that such financing processes often take more than a year to accomplish and that the Town should act now in anticipation of continued residential development and increased demand.

Mayor Wells agreed, noting that recent financial improvements and better budget transparency, thanks to Mr. Ojeda's ongoing work, position the Town to begin tackling these future infrastructure challenges with more confidence and foresight.

28. Councilor Lannamañ

Councilor Reneé Lannamañ publicly extended her appreciation to the Public Works Department, specifically commending Public Services Director, Morgan Cates, for his swift and effective response to sidewalk damage at the townhouse portion of Venezia. She noted that the damage, caused by heavy construction equipment, could have become a costly issue for the Town, but thanks to coordination between the HOA, Public Works, and developer Ron Roberts, the repairs were addressed without financial burden to the Town. She emphasized the importance of recognizing staff contributions and thanked the entire department for their ongoing efforts.

Councilor Lannamañ also raised a question regarding a line item in the financial report reflecting "outside security services," expressing confusion about what that entailed. Town Manager, Sean O'Keefe, clarified that the line item likely referred to special law enforcement shifts, such as officers working at UCF events, which are reimbursed to the Town along with a small administrative fee. Councilor Lannamañ confirmed she would revisit the topic during the Capital Improvements Plan (CIP) discussion but appreciated the clarification for now.

The conversation turned briefly to housing developments, with Councilor Miles and Councilor Lannamañ observing that all the Venezia Townhomes appeared occupied, suggesting they had sold out quickly. Mayor Wells noted that many of the units closed before the end of the previous calendar year, which will positively impact the Town's upcoming *ad valorem* tax revenues. Councilor Miles agreed and expressed hope for similar benefits once Drake Point is annexed into the Town.

29. Mayor Wells

Mayor Wells thanked Town Planner, April Fisher, and Town Attorney, Tom Wilkes, for their assistance during the meeting. Mayor Wells also thanked Victoria Roszkiewicz for filling in for Town Clerk, John Brock, who was out sick.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion made by Councilor Lannamañ, Seconded by Mayor Pro Tem Everline.

Voting Yea: Mayor Pro Tem Everline, Councilor Arnold, Councilor Lannamañ, Councilor Miles, Mayor Wells

There being no further business to discuss, a motion was made by Councilor Lannamañ to adjourn the meeting; Mayor Pro Tem Everline seconded the motion. Motion was approved unanimously by voice vote.

The Meeting adjourned at 9:12 p.m. | **Attendees: 49**

Graham Wells, CMC, Mayor

ATTEST:

John Brock, Town Clerk